

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Natural Endowments & Entitlement

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Comment

In “Natural Assets and Arbitrariness”, Robert Nozick reviews John Rawls’ position that the distribution of holdings (primary goods) should not depend upon natural endowments because natural endowments are undeserved and arbitrary from a moral point of view. In “The Positive Argument”, Nozick then presents argument D that might be used to justify Rawls’ belief that the influence of natural differences ought to be corrected. After that, in “The Negative Argument”, Nozick presents argument G, which he believes refutes Rawls’ position.

Reading

Nozick, R. (1974). [Chapter 7, section II]. In *Anarchy, state, and utopia* (pp. 183–231). Blackwell.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. What is Robert Nozick’s argument D? Why does Nozick believe that it ultimately fails to fully defend John Rawls’ position?
2. What is Nozick’s argument G? (Hint: to understand the plausibility of premise 1 in argument G, you’ll need to first understand premises 1 and 2 of argument F.)
3. Why does Nozick believe it is problematic to try and exclude all “morally arbitrary” features of individuals from the original position?
4. Why does Nozick believe it is morally troubling and perhaps inconsistent for Rawls to maintain that the totality of a community’s natural assets should be viewed as a collective asset for the ends of society?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.